



# The Aesthetics of the Human Beast: A Comparative Study of Zola's *L'Assommoir*, Galdós' *La Desheredada* and Crane's *Maggie*

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## Abstract

The concept of the human beast is assigned to the French novelist, Émile Zola, who is the first to codify principles of Naturalism, against which all future naturalist works would be compared. In his novels, especially in the saga *Les Rougon-Macquart*, the human beast, «la bête humaine», appears as a literary character embedded in the lower social strata, who, due to harsh working and living conditions in the French capital during the Second Empire, acts according to its most basic instincts. The actions of a human beast are violent and brutal and its behavior conditioned by limited education. In his novels, Zola applies the doctrines of biological determinism as well as the laws of heredity attained from scientific readings that were very popular among the intellectuals of the period. However, the theoretical principles recollected in *Le roman expérimental* (G. Charpentier et Cie Éditeurs, 1880) were not equally applied in other countries due to different literary precedents as well as diverse socio-historical and philosophical backgrounds. This paper aims to examine the nuances in the aesthetic representation of the human beast in Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877), Galdós' *La Desheredada* (1881) and Crane's *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (1843), delving into the behavioral patterns which shape the unique characteristics of their human beasts.

**Keywords** Naturalism · Determinism · Genetic heredity · Environment · Human beast

Écoutez tout le monde: “Ah! Oui, les naturalistes, ces gens qui ont des mains sales, qui veulent que tous les romans soient écrits en argot et qui choisissent de parti pris les sujets les plus dégoûtants, dans les basses classes et dans les mauvais lieux.” Mais pas du tout, vous mentez! Vous faites misérablement du

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naturalisme une question de rhétorique, lorsque je me suis toujours efforcé d'en faire une question de méthode (Zola, 1890: 256).

## Introduction

The lines which head this article reflect very well the critique Zola had to face after having published the first naturalist novels from the saga *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871–1893). His colleagues rebuked him for the use of vulgar language, descriptions of everyday affairs, even the most private ones and of no poetic interest, and moreover, for making the working class the protagonist of his novels. Even though the lowest social class had already been introduced in the realistic era—by Balzac or Flaubert, for example; Auerbach points out that “[w]ith the first great realists of the century, with Stendhal, Balzac, and even with Flaubert, the lower strata of the people, and indeed the people as such in general, hardly appear. And when it appears, it is seen not on its own premises, within its own life, but from above” (2003: 497). It is Émile Zola who introduces the worker as a protagonist and takes the opportunity to carry out a social critique highlighting issues of social injustice, such as poor working conditions and poverty, which he further links to alcoholism, prostitution and violence, according to the theoretical doctrine manifested in his *Le Roman expérimental* (1880).

## Philosophical Background

French Naturalism arises with the desire to overcome Idealism and Romanticism, but above all as a reaction to the political, scientific, philosophical and, ultimately, social situation under the Second Empire. This most influential reorientation of the time can be characterized as the attitude to unify thought and artistic-literary creation around positivist principles which is the leading philosophical system of the second half of the nineteenth century (Caudet, 1995). Especially relevant in this transition is the positivist philosophy championed by Auguste Comte, who claims that there is a connection between single phenomena and some general facts subjected to invariable natural Laws. Society has its structural sense which is configured as an organic whole and the events which occur within an individual have a direct impact on the whole (Prado, 1994). According to this principle, the individual loses his freedom and independent functionality, so to say, his free will, and is conditioned and conjugated by the always predominant environment (*milieu*).

In regard to Spain, the positivist philosophy also plays an important role in the configuration of national thinking, but it is partially modified by *krausism* which penetrates Spain from Germany. It should not be forgotten that *krausism*, positivism and the newly composed symbiosis referred to as *krausopositivism* by Adolfo Posada are minority currents, whose dynamism mobilizes only the intellectual sector of liberal progressivists, outside the hegemonic discourse of the ruling classes (aristocracy and high bourgeoisie) and outside the effective political and economic

power of those classes. The politics of Spain were dominantly ruled by the Dynastic Liberal Party and nourishes itself from traditional values of Catholic order more than from the positivist ideology (Lissorgues, 2008). *Krausopositivism* becomes a dividing force between the intellectuals of the period: a young and enthusiastic generation moved to modernize Spain, and the opponents who defend traditional values and strongly oppose any kind of change. The Krausists create controversies concerning religion and philosophy; nevertheless, they do not adhere to clear or well-defined philosophical criteria, but rather pretend to find a middle way between idealism and materialism. They believe that society can be reformed or improved through education. The appeal to the critical spirit attracts the attention of Spanish freethinkers who are interested in both the positivism of Comte and Taine and, later, Spencer and the so-called *spencerism*, which peculiarly applies the Darwinian theory to the elucidation of social evolution. Although they accept progress and with it the penetration of science into literature, it is fairly impossible for positivism to be implemented in the same way as in France: “Con la variante espiritualista, la novela española tal vez iba a ser capaz de superar final-mente los demonios del positivismo, y armonizar las tendencias materialistas de la época con las sempiternas elucubraciones idealistas de corte neocatólico o krausista” (Caudet, 1988: 69).

Lastly, in the United States, the turn-of-the-century in which the classical Naturalism took place is suffused mainly with the deterministic philosophy. The concept of free will is broadly discussed and treated by naturalist writers who contribute in creating a space in which individual effort counts less than the forces of environment and heredity. The very first representatives of American Naturalism, though coming from different intellectual backgrounds and having few personal connections with each other, share certain characteristics embedded in the theoretical premises of the literary movement: set in poor urban landscapes, interest in laws of heredity and the influence of the *milieu*, and “a deep sense that U.S. culture and the realist literature it had produced were wholly inadequate to respond to the social problems they saw” (Campbell, 2011: 501). The classical Naturalism based on the biological determinism will be progressively replaced by Spencer’s concept of Social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest, and in the twentieth century, three additional forms of Naturalism appear due to the development of interior socio-political affairs: Progressive Era novel of reform (protesting on a particular social evil), Proletarian novel of the Great Depression (political agenda) and Dystopian city novel of the 1960s and later (Campbell, 2011).

## Literary Precedents

The literary tradition previous to the outbreak of Naturalism is a key factor to be taken into account in order to understand the nuances in the application of naturalist theoretical premises. Zola departs from the realist tradition of such masters as Balzac or Flaubert who adopt a way of writing to narrate the life of their period (Auerbach, 1953/2003). In Balzac, the vital condition of his protagonists is mainly reflected in very detailed descriptions of their surroundings:

Dès lors l'individu compte bien peu; on le fera autant connaître par la description de la maison qu'il habite, par le portait des gens qu'il fréquente, y compris sa concierge, ses fournisseurs et sa bonne, que par les événements de sa propre existence. En un mot, les observations et leur mise en œuvre seront conduites à un point de vue strictement matérialiste; elles iront surtout à ce qui est tangible ou aisément constatable, non à ce qui se devine; l'intérêt suffira à expliquer la plupart des actions, sans qu'il faille faire intervenir le sentiment (Martino, 1972: 64).

This kind of substitution of a direct description of the characters through their psychology and instead focusing on their implicit characterization through the environment in which they live and act (where nothing can be perceived without this fatal link between the individual and their environment) is what is understood as the deterministic forces of the *milieu*, theorized and justified in Taine's doctrine. The differences between Realism and Naturalism, and in particular between the style of Zola and that of Balzac or Flaubert, has sometimes been exaggerated, saying, e.g. that realist literature is still essentially narrative, whereas naturalistic literature emphasizes description at the expense of narration. In this sense, it is emphasized that Zola goes further, providing excessive documentary details, trying to find a scientific relationship between material circumstances and the failure of his protagonists. We really could not demonstrate that the weight of the meticulously descriptive content with respect to the narrative one is greater or lesser in one case or another. More than in formal factors, differences must be sought in the argumentative logic, in the ideas: the deterministic, even mechanistic doctrine that forms the backbone of Zola's stories, feels like a kind of methodical or ideological corset, which conditions everything and simplifies characters, while in realistic literature characters remain the radiating factor for all action, and the medium is rather a set of obstacles that they face as agents, not as patients or victims. On the other hand, Galdós' literary background is diametrically different and neither of the so-called realist-naturalists want to admit to Zola's influence on their way of writing, allotting rather negative connotations to the French Naturalism:

Cuando Clarín, la Pardo Bazán, Altamira, Gómez Ortiz consideran oportuno el uso de la palabra *naturalismo*, mientras que otros escritores prefieren atenderse a la de *realismo*, de sentido más ancho, se trata de un naturalismo depurado de dichos presupuestos [presupuestos positivistas y científicistas de los que deriva el naturalismo zolesco al negar el papel de la imaginación y proclamar la impersonalidad narrativa] (Lissorgues, 1997: 74).

This rejection of French Naturalism is due to the fact that most of the Spanish writers either question and judge many of the essential principles of the French school as erratic and twisted, or manifest their nationalistic feeling in regard to their own literary tradition (Caudet, 1988). Spanish Naturalism, also known as «mitigated Naturalism» (Pattinson, 1969), sinks its roots in the picaresque novel and even in Cervantine tradition of *The Exemplary Novels* or *Quixote* (Pattinson, 1969; López Jiménez, 1977). The most powerful ideological cause of this reservation is that for

Spanish Naturalism the annulment of free will that entails the strict application of Zola's determinism is unacceptable.

In the United States, the urge to respond to the social problems of the period presents itself impossible to fulfil with the realist literary tradition represented by Horatio Alger, Jr., William Dean Howells or Mark Twain. The new generation of naturalist writers appears with its representatives who adopt a specific aspect of Zola's doctrine. Frank Norris puts into practice Zola's scientific experimentation to test the physical and emotional responses of the individual set in a particular environment, Stephen Crane provides a satirical point of view regarding the typical slum stories and other conventions of deterministic premises, Theodor Dreiser and Jack London base their practice on direct observation of human behavior and natural phenomena. The main difference between American realists and naturalists lies in the very concept of free will. In the latter literary aesthetics, the characters cannot refrain from acting (Campbell, 2011).

### Critical Debate around Zola's Theoretical Premises

If French positivism is determinant for the collective point of view, the genetic heredity would correspond to individual ethics. Lucas reads *Traité de l'hérédité naturelle* (1850) by Dr. Prosper Lucas and applies his theories in the saga *Les Rougon-Macquart*, where the misfortune of the protagonists, apart from being determined by the environment, is a priori genetically encoded. If we take the female protagonist of *L'Assommoir*, Gervaise, a child of a bastard branch, the Macquart, her fate is therefore foreshadowed by this fact. In a similar way, Isidora, the protagonist of *La Desheredada*, and her brother Mariano, also come from a family who suffer from inherited mental illness: their father dies in a mental asylum and their uncle suffers bouts of losing his grip on reality. On the contrary, in Crane's *Maggie*, the protagonist is untouched by the heredity flaws embedded in the Naturalist doctrine and as Pizer claims: "she [Maggie] functions as an almost expressionistic symbol of inner purity uncorrupted by external foulness" (1965: 168). Indeed, according to Pizer, her mother as well as her brother are victims of their ideas of moral propriety and therefore, they are *insane socially*, paying more attention to what is expected from them than to what they actually may feel and think. Maggie's misfortune is caused rather by the shattered morals of the society than by her condition of being born poor or mentally insane. Therefore, the novella represents a moral critique of individual freedom as well as its ethical implications, which seal the fate of the girl. However, in other American novels following naturalist aesthetics, the characters are mainly defined by their heredity and often portrayed with a lack of intelligence and limited possibilities to escape their fate, trapped in a whirl of deterministic forces, physical and mental flaws and few economic opportunities. Pizer claims that "the American naturalist tragic hero is not a noble character who falls from a high position; rather, he is a character whose 'potential for fineness' is blocked or crushed by circumstance" (Pizer, 1998: 22).

In regard to the theoretical framework of literary Naturalism, Zola has been severely criticized for a naive and simplistic application of his so-called scientific

method in his novels; he knew very little about its scientific functioning. It has been especially noted that the theoretical foundation, woven as a support for his stories, is weak and subjective, since it was Zola alone who was responsible for its formulation. Mitterand writes: “Il n’existe vraiment qu’un discours, ou si l’on préfère un méta-discours naturaliste constitué, c’est celui de Zola” (2002: 18). Therefore, we cannot really discuss a doctrine, but rather Zola’s artistic experimentation that, moreover, does not match the practice:

Le discours naturaliste théorise un roman qui n’a pas été écrit, ou qui a été écrit autrement: *Germinal* n’est pas l’application de *Le roman expérimental*. Et le roman naturaliste réunit des traits littéraires que *Le roman expérimental* ne permet pas à lui seul de cerner, et dont ni Zola ni ses amis n’ont tenté l’analyse (Mitterand, 2002: 18).

Despite the great expressive power with which this literature seduces much of its criticism, its theoretical weaknesses do not cease to provoke teasing and censorship. Regardless of that, Naturalism and Zola’s theories spread throughout much of Europe and also reach the United States in a particular form. Even so, the critical debates over Naturalism on the other side of the ocean also tend to focus on its limitations:

The limited possibilities of plots governed by its deterministic philosophy; the limitations of characters, defined by their heredity and often hampered by a lack of intelligence and economic opportunities; and the self-imposed limits of the writers working within the laws of probability and what could rationally or scientifically be explained (Campbell, 2011: 504).

## The Human Beast

Indeed, many characteristics established by Zola perpetuated in other Naturalisms, such as the importance of the environment, social determinism, the aesthetics of the ugly, or, precisely the object of the present study: the human beast. Bonet (1972) provides an accurate definition of this new character as “un individuo de carne y hueso, con sentimientos e instintos, y en perpetua lucha siempre con un entorno físico-sociológico en el cual influye y, al mismo tiempo, es influido” (1989: 17). This reciprocal relationship between the characters and the environment is the basis of the aesthetics of the human beast. Inspired by Darwinian formulations, Zola attributes animal characteristics to humans, that is, without doubt, a little bit simplistic, but at the same time very convincing to the extent that social misery reinforces the most hateful easements. For these reasons, the author of this article understands the concept of the human beast as both: a dehumanized character who, on the one hand, physically resembles an animal and on the other hand, who reproduces patterns of animal behavior through their basic instincts: “Les personnages sont des pantins qui empruntent à l’animal un comportement grotesque; ou bien ce sont des monstres qui incarnent le mythe redoutable de l’union de l’homme et la bête” (Bonnefis, 1968: 100).

The resemblance of the characters to animals is certainly due to Balzac's influence on Zola when the application of Darwinism on human behavior is taken into account. In the avant-propos to *La Comédie Humaine* Balzac writes:

[...] la Société ressemblait à la Nature. La Société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a des variétés en zoologie? Les différences entre un soldat, un ouvrier, un administrateur, un avocat, un oisif, un savant, un homme d'État, un commerçant, un marin, un poète, un pauvre, un prêtre, sont, quoique plus difficiles à saisir, aussi considérables que celles qui distinguent le loup, le lion, l'âne, le corbeau, le requin, le veau marin, la brebis, etc. Il a donc existé, il existera donc de tout temps des Espèces Sociales comme il y a des Espèces Zoologiques" (1976: 8).

Even though the aesthetics of the human beast are tightly assigned to Zola as a key concept of Naturalism, the idea, however, is not new. Zola borrows it from Balzac, Balzac probably from La Fontaine and La Fontaine from Aesop. It is common knowledge that the first doctoral dissertation of Taine was devoted to demonstrating how La Fontaine's celebrated fables accurately reflect each and every one of the social types of the time of Louis XIV.

From this tradition, the most evident borrowing is the choice of the surnames of certain characters in *L'Assommoir*, which points directly at the animal with similar behavioral patterns, such as Mrs. Lerat (lérot = garden dormouse), the Poisson (fish) family or Mrs. Putois (polecat), to name a few. Similarly, in *La Desheredada* by Galdós, there is a family clan called Pez (fish), a surname that works in the novel as a *nomen omen*, approaching the animalistic features to personal qualities. Miquis describes this clan as *remora vastatrix* (Desheredada: 222), a species that adheres to a larger fish using them as a means of transport. The Pez family is characterized by its ability to penetrate high social strata and stay there parasitizing on public institutions. Galdós' employment of the animalization of his characters is preceded by several articles published anonymously in *La Nación*, before publishing the novel. According to Bravo-Villasante, "[s]in firma se publican en *La Nación* unos artículos que tienen toda la traza de ser galdosianos, titulados *Clasificación zoológica*: el hombre-culebra, el hombre-murciélago, el hombre-toro, el hombre-cotorra, el hombre-mono" (1976: 52). Likewise, the surname of Juan Bou, the Catalan lithographer representing the proletariat in the novel, suggests an ox that supports the bourgeoisie with its strength, which occupies the top of the pyramid of the capitalist system. Isidora's aunt Encarnación is given the nickname *La Sanguijuelera*. A nickname given not only due to the fact that she keeps bottled leeches in her shop, but also and above all, because she belongs to those individuals who 'suck the blood' of the society without providing any benefit in return. Curiously, this characteristic animal naming is not shared by Stephen Crane who opted for realistic names for his characters; in any case, the brutality of the fighting scenes offers a beastly imagery, which stigmatize the characters not by their names, but by their actions, as will be discussed afterwards.

Although the work of the three studied authors can be found analogous to a certain degree, examples of human beasts, their function and meaning within the texts



are different and deserve further analysis. In *L'Assommoir*, Zola reaches the summit of animal representation with 340 references and it is stated, that the amount of animalistic references varies according to the degree of expressivity or intensity of the considered novel (Bonnefis, 1968: 98). In Zola's novel, animal behavior predominates mostly in male gender, because of their innate violence that places them in direct conflict with what is reasonably human. Therefore, the aesthetics of Zola's human beast is mostly conveyed through their force and its abuse. In Crane's *Maggie*, the amount of wrath and temper is comparable to Zola's, but Crane extends the violence to both sexes in almost comparable measure. That does not mean that Zola's human beasts are exclusively limited to the male gender, but except for the initial fight between Gervaise and Virginie, women are usually victims. On the contrary, in the case of American Naturalism, the ever-present violence is gender free.

In contrast, there is no space for a violent human beast in Galdós. According to the Cervantine tradition, the animal traits of the characters are most likely comparable to the ones found in Aesop's or La Fontaine's fables. Whereas in Zola's and Crane's texts these animal-like characters are cruel beings who have lost their humanity as the result of a hard life that has led them to alcoholism (in both cases alcohol is a trigger for their violence), intensifying characters' primitive instincts, and especially anger, in Galdós, their function is to highlight and even exaggerate the affinities that their behavior has with the animal. At the same time, the Spanish author conjugates this resource with a moral tenor of the tempering inhumanity and comic and ironic tropes. The irony, present in Galdós and irrelevant in Zola's novel because of his direct style, becomes an essential feature in Crane, whose writing method prefers obliqueness and indirection, so as to make the reader "look beyond literal meaning, to seek beyond the immediately discernible for the underlying reality" (Pizer, 1965: 168). In all of the discussed cases, this efficient characterization is achieved by description of the gestural behavior as well as their paralinguistic manifestations which will be examined hereunder.

The setting for naturalist novels is commonly the urban jungle, which highlights the theme of human beings confronting natural forces. Zola chooses the poorest neighborhood in an urban environment of Paris, and a similar choice is also taken by Galdós and Crane: while Galdós places his characters in the outskirts of Madrid, Crane sets Maggie's family in New York. In this way, the low-class individuals are isolated in their corresponding suburbs: la Goutte-d'Or, Las Peñuelas and the Bowery slum, respectively. In all cases, the environment is described as decadent, filthy and extremely poor, where the mass of people merges with the scenery. However, the female protagonists contrast in their unique ways with their habitat. Both Gervaise and Isidora follow the plot of 'going-to-the-city' from their respective villages as pure and innocent creatures and Maggie, although a permanent citizen, is described as a flower in the middle of a muddy puddle. However, all three women will suffer a downfall due to the destructive forces of the big city from which it is impossible to escape. They will become victims of the determinist forces which transform them into morally corrupt human beasts.

What all three authors have in common is their use of animalistic metaphors in order to describe certain behaviors far from those expected in human beings. These anomalous behaviors reveal the social origins of the characters and their difficult



position in a society in which they fail to fit. The predominant topics where this resource can be observed are mainly four: eating habits, sexual expression, alcoholism as a predominant vice, and an omnipresent violence. Consequently, they will be analyzed one by one.

## Human Beast and the Aesthetics of Eating

Even though in Zola's *L'Assommoir* all the deadly sins can be found, it is gluttony he places special emphasis on. Zola's characters do not eat, but devour like beasts. According to Borie, the impression of the material and moral degradation that Zola transmits to us can be specially found in the descriptions of people eating:

[il y a] quarante pages au milieu du roman où l'on mange. Les dîneurs à table sont toujours très absorbés par leur assiette: ils nous tournent le dos, et aussi à l'auteur. C'est alors que celui-ci peut se retirer sur la pointe des pieds et que, seuls derrière les convives, nous pouvons vraiment les voir: litière de porcs vautrés dans le bonheur abominable de leur fange (1971: 39).

During the culminating scene of the novel, Gervaise's birthday feast, the whole action comes down to nonverbal expression of grinding jaws with a total lack of conversation because of the guests' full mouths: "Les hommes déboutonnaient leur gilet, les dames s'essuyaient la figure avec leur serviette [...] seuls, quelques convives, les mâchoires en branle, continuaient à avaler de grosses bouchées de pain, sans même s'en apercevoir" (*Assommoir*: 575). The indecent way of eating, described in rude detail can be found in other novels by Zola, such as *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873). At the time, the inclusion of such an ordinary action as eating in literature aroused burning criticism from the mouths of his contemporaries, such as this from the forked-tongue Barbey d'Aurevilly:

[...] dans le sens de vulgarité et de matière qui nous emporte de plus en plus... Mais ce ne sera pas la dernière! Il y a plus bas que le ventre. Il y a ce qu'on y met et il y a ce qui sort. Aujourd'hui on nous donne de la charcuterie. Demain, ce sera de la vidange. Et ce sera peut-être M. Zola qui nous décrira cette nouvelle chose, avec cette plume qui n'oublie rien (1999: 214).

Galdós also uses this resource, however, not in this strictly vulgar meaning. His employment is rather ironic, coming from the Cervantine tradition and the picaresque novel, sometimes even comic. The animal representation mostly serves as an instrument of satire laying bare the absurdities of those of poor blood, devoid of intelligence. For instance, Isidora's brother, Mariano, aka Pecado, gives us a clear example: "—Yo quiero cenar—afirmó él con brutal terquedad, echando a un lado la cabeza y dando un golpe con ella sobre la mesa" (*Desheredada*: 250). This gesture expresses his stubbornness and coarseness, like that of a ram. His way of eating 'devouring', with no manners, approximating him to an animal: "Pecado devoraba con el apetito insaciable de una bestia atada al pesebre, después de un día de atroz trabajo" (*Desheredada*: 107). Through this metaphor, Galdós describes Mariano

as a domesticated animal, as suggested by its position next to the manger, but also overexploited, emphasizing the hard work through the adjective ‘atrocious’, which further enhances this quality.

In another scene, when Isidora, out of pride, rejects some Christmas sweets offered by a person who had previously insulted her, it is her brother who acting like an animal, rushes headlong to get some despite his sister’s prohibition: “—¡Malcriado... glotón! —le dijo cuando otra vez se quedaron solos—. ¿No has comido ya bastante? Mariano negó con la cabeza, por no poder hacerlo con la boca” (*Desheredada*: 253). In this case, the gesture has to replace the word *a fortiori*, because the obstruction of the mouth prevents any kind of verbal articulation. Galdós does not save us from the characterizations of Mariano’s animalism, almost risking exaggeration: “Echado de bruces sobre la mesa, la barba apoyada en el arco que con sus brazos hacía, a Isidora contemplaba en silencio con la seriedad y atención hosca de uno de esos perrazos que muerden a todo el mundo menos a su amo” (*Desheredada*: 250). The comparison is, again, brutal: it suggests that Mariano is little more than a mad dog that becomes meek to the one who feeds him.

The ferocious gluttony can also be seen in the case of Crane’s *Maggie* where the children feed themselves like animals struggling for survival:

With prodigious clatter they arranged themselves at table. The babe sat with his feet dangling high from a precarious infant’s chair and gorged his small stomach. Jimmie forced, with feverish rapidity, the grease-enveloped pieces between his wounded lips. Maggie, with side glances of fear of interruption, ate like a small pursued tigress. (*Maggie*: 6)

Hunger is present in each of the works because it is a synonym of poverty depicted in naturalist novels. Filling the belly is one of the basic instincts that these people must satisfy in order to survive in the jungle of the metropolis. The savoir-faire of people eating is conditioned both by their lack of education and their harsh living conditions. However, it is Galdós and Crane who use children in order to stress this deprivation and even between these two authors, there is one important difference: Galdós makes the influence of *krausism* evident, making Mariano a victim of a failing educational system which he urges to be reformed. In this way, Mariano is still given a remote opportunity to improve his life; whereas Maggie and her brothers are not.

## Human Beast and the Aesthetics of Sexual Desire

Another of the basic instincts is sexual intercourse to preserve the species. The explicit sexual desire in naturalist novels is mainly expressed as a type of violent aggression of men towards women exemplified in their corporal expressiveness. It is not by accident that the critics point at the predominance of the female body on display in naturalist texts (Campbell, 2011); the three protagonists end up as prostitutes, and Zola even physically uncovers the female body in scenes not necessarily with sexual undertone, such as the fight among Virginie and Gervaise where the author lets us catch a glimpse of their flesh. In addition, in *L’Assommoir*, women are

portrayed as prey to the male predators, just like any scene from a jungle hunt. Borie states that “La violence virile du héros, elle est aussi le monstre menaçant” (1971: 47), because men are driven by an appetite that turns them into animals that attack from behind; the erotic impulse crystallizes in febrile movements and vehement agitations: “baiser la nuque, haleine brûlante qui vient faire trembler les cheveux follets et frissonner la nuque désirée” (*ibid.*). In *L’Assommoir*, the best example to illustrate this behavior would undoubtedly be the night scene between Gervaise and the father of her children who left them at the beginning of the novel, Lantier. Although Gervaise got married to another man, in this scene, Lantier wants to unleash his desire to seduce her and get back what he understands as his property: “Mais, un soir, se trouvant seul avec elle, il la poussa devant lui sans dire une parole, l’accula tremblante contre le mur, au fond de la boutique, et là voulut l’embrasser” (*Assommoir*: 613). In this case, it is not only a lack of morals, but also an abuse of force that is imposed on the protagonist. In more or less degree, this kind of sexual aggression is present throughout the whole novel: from pinching a woman’s leg under the table to violent attacks in search of sexual satiation.

In the case of Galdós, this erotically enhanced hunting is not related to violence, but rather to a kind of flirting game. Isidora and Miquis are the protagonists of an erotically charged scene in the park that shows Miquis’ interest in her. In this scene, a moment of sexual tension is presented by means of Miquis’ dilemma-blackmailing joke. His aim to hug the girl is obvious and explicit; although wrapped in a verbal joke, the approach to Isidora obeys a true erotic impulse and the jocular atmosphere and laughter are only to help nature fulfil its ends: “Ambos se detuvieron mirándose entre risas.—Si no me das un abrazo me meto en la jaula del león... Quiero que me almuerce. O tu amor o el suicidio” (*Desheredada*: 124), or “—¿Quieres ver al oso? Aquí me tienes. —Sí que lo eres —dijo Isidora riendo con toda su alma” (*Desheredada*: 125). By no means can this scene be comparable to the one from Zola’s novel. However, the aim of both is the same; to approach the hunter’s prey. The approximation of Pete to Maggie in Crane’s text is not as explicitly charged with beast-like behavior, but the goal is very similar to the one expressed in *La Desheredada*. Through sexual selection, both female protagonists look for a suitable male for the best preservation of their offspring and as a means to escape their environment. It is mainly a natural instinct or atavism in order to improve their social and cultural conditions, in the sense of guaranteeing a more advantageous position for their descendants (Miller, 2000). The reason why this attitude, apparently as natural as culturally ‘justifiable’, leads to failure in both cases lies, in the case of Isidora, in the fantasy of the protagonist. Isidora’s fascination with false appearances is charged the highest price: the complete deterioration of her moral state. In this way, Galdós expresses his concerns about the real value of morality within the society in which he lives. On the other hand, Maggie’s lover is persecuted by her brother Jimmy, as being responsible for her escape. Even though Crane believes in the influence of the environment on human lives, he differs from Zola’s social determinism putting an ironic emphasis on the weaknesses of society’s morals that exert greater power than the physical environment. The powerful need to maintain one’s reputation is a pattern that prevents Maggie from the final escape, and it is also directly responsible for her downfall.

## Human Beast and the Aesthetics of Alcoholism

As in Baudelaire's *Les Paradis Artificiels* (1860), alcohol is one of the main causes of the physical as well as moral decay of the characters. In *L'Assommoir*, the «machine à souler» in père Colombe's bar, is presented as an animated mythological beast for its harmful force: “aux longs cols, des serpentins descendant sous terre, une cuisine du diable devant laquelle venaient rêver les ouvriers soûlards” (*Assommoir*: 404). The distilling device appears several times in the story and it is always with an atrocious connotation of a monster who wants to engulf people:

Elle se tourna, elle aperçut l'alambic, la machine à souler, fonctionnant sous le vitrage de l'étroite cour, avec la trépidation profonde de sa cuisine d'enfer. Le soir, les cuivres étaient plus mornes, allumés seulement sur leur rondeur d'une large étoile rouge; et l'ombre de l'appareil, contre la muraille du fond, dessinait des abominations, des figures avec des queues, des monstres ouvrant leurs mâchoires comme pour avaler le monde (*Assommoir*: 704).

In *L'Assommoir*, the harsh conditions of Parisian workers, the urban landscape of the French capital, as well as the physical and psychological flaws that Gervaise inherits from her father, are the irrefutable circumstances that determine the fate of the heroine. First, alcohol kills Coupeau who at the end of his life resembles a horrific caricature, the worst version of his ugliest self:

Quand elle le regarda sous le nez, les bras lui tombèrent. Était-ce Dieu possible qu'il eût une figure pareille, avec du sang dans les yeux et des croûtes plein les lèvres? Elle ne l'aurait bien sûr pas reconnu. D'abord, il faisait trop de grimaces, sans dire pourquoi, la margoulette tout d'un coup à l'envers, le nez froncé, les joues tirées, un vrai museau d'animal (*Assommoir*: 782-783).

Then, it is Gervaise whose portrayal is unrecognizable from that of her younger self:

Comme elle était vieillie et dégommée! La chaleur fondait la neige sur ses cheveux et ses vêtements, elle ruisselait. Sa pauvre tête branlante était toute grise, des mèches grises que le vent avait envolées. Le cou engoncé dans les épaules, elle se tassait, laide et grosse à donner envie de pleurer (*Assommoir*: 776).

Zola's reason to introduce alcohol in the novel is none but moralist. In the working environment, there are honest workers who exercise their profession with dignity and do not visit bars. But there are also those who succumb to the difficulties of everyday life and try to escape from their atrocious reality by means of alcohol. Zola makes a distinction between these two classes of workers by their cleanliness: Coupeau's bar mates are dirty and ugly, as if Zola liked to underline their moral decay by exaggerating their negative features. Together, they also resemble a herd of animals for their inappropriate behavior in public: “[l]es camarades trouvèrent la blague si bonne, qu'ils se jetèrent les uns sur les autres, braillant et se frottant les épaules comme des ânes qu'on étrille. Le zingueur avait la bouche fendue par un

tel rire, qu'on lui voyait jusqu'au gosier" (*Assommoir*: 703). Zola compares their behavior to that of a donkey, dazed by alcohol, laughing like ill-mannered brutes. Alcohol turns the characters into dehumanized creatures whose animalistic behavior is mainly expressed through their paralinguistic utterances.

Even though there is no evidence of alcoholism in Galdós, as it could not be allowed in the socio-cultural background of a Catholic Spain, it is also the main cause of both the moral and physical fall in the case of Maggie's parents in Crane's novella. It is in fact her mother who loses her head because of alcoholism. In this way, Crane challenges naturalist conventions of a drunken father who displays violence to his wife and children. For Maggie, the violent parent is Mrs. Johnson. One day, when she returns home drunk and is provoked by street kids yelling and making fun of her, her description is reduced to "kicks of exasperation", "howls", "the air full of her tossing fists", "flames of unreasoning rage" or "eagerness for a fight" (*Maggie*: 26–27). Alcohol brings the worst out of her and its effect on her is that of extreme, inhuman violence, characteristic of an enraged beast, aggravated by the fact she is a woman. In fact, Mrs. Johnsons personifies the slum where Maggie lives: "Her drunken rages symbolize the animal fury of a slum home, and her quickness to judge, condemn, and cast out Maggie symbolizes the self-righteousness of Bowery morality" (Pizer, 1998: 149).

When Pete (Maggie's lover) also falls into the trap of alcohol at the end of the story, we find him completely drunk, fallen on the floor. His speech is reduced to the nonsense of a drunkard that culminates with grunts before he falls unconscious. His progressive degradation turns the "lion of lordly characteristics" (*Maggie*: 36) into a pathetic womanizer lying motionless on the floor with "[t]he wine from an overturned glass [dripping] softly down upon blotches on the man's neck" (*Maggie*: 55).

## Human Beast and the Aesthetics of Violence

Violence is, without doubt, the most significant feature which characterizes the human beast in all three of the texts. Both Zola's and Crane's texts share, moreover, the most brutal and omnipresent expressions of violent behavior portrayed through menacing fists, slaps, kicks and punches. In Zola, the violence exerted towards women shows the virile superiority over them. Men turn into beasts in front of a weaker individual, a fact that also leaves evidence of the lack of self-control which has to be compensated through violent and menacing behavior. It can be scarcely found in Galdós' *La Desheredada*, except for the scene where Isidora's last lover *Gaitica* leaves her with some bruises and a scar on her cheek: "She ends up falling into the clutches of *Gaitica*, and for three months suffers her worst degradation at his hands, adopting his uncouth ways and language until he finally disfigures her, just as he had slashed Mariano's cheek" (Ribbans, 2010:795).

In *L'Assommoir*, Bijard, who beats and finally kills his wife, is a perfect example of this cowardice. The brutality of these scenes is underlined with detailed descriptions of his victim: ripped out hair, presence of blood, blows of his fists and heels on the skin of the woman. Zola emphasizes the horror introducing Bijard's daughter as the following victim of his rage:

Quand il revenait soûl, il lui fallait des femmes à massacrer. Il ne s'apercevait seulement pas que Lalie était toute petite; il n'aurait pas tapé plus fort sur une vieille peau. D'une claque, il lui couvrait la figure entière, et la chair avait encore tant de délicatesse, que les cinq doigts restaient marqués pendant deux jours. C'étaient des tripotées indignes, des trépignées pour un oui, pour un non, un loup enragé tombant sur un pauvre petit chat, craintif et câlin, maigre à faire pleurer, et qui recevait ça avec ses beaux yeux résignés, sans se plaindre (*Assommoir*: 689).

"Non, jamais on ne se douterait des idées de férocité qui peuvent pousser au fond d'une cervelle de pochard" (*Assommoir*: 691), Zola comments bitterly at the end of this terrifying scene.

Even though it has been said that it is alcohol that triggers the violent behavior, it is not totally responsible. In the environment depicted by Zola, violence, to a greater or lesser degree, is present as a constant. A wife and a husband during marital quarrels, parents and their children during their every-day fights or workmates among themselves treat each other aggressively having no other resources to solve their problems. Zola also points at the lack of education which reduces characters' decision making and problem solving to slaps and punches. Even among women, there is evidence of violence as in the case of the aforementioned fight between Gervaise and Virginie. It is the violence of ordinary women, stupid, but not in the sense of an individual trait, but as the typical behavior of people of the lower social class. They push each other, spit from behind, but never reach the level of male brutality. In a similar way, Crane sets an omnipresent violence around Johnson's family: the children's battle that opens the story, Jimmy fighting with his own family and the father solving problematic situation with slaps, to provide a few examples. Also Maggie mistreats the babe Tommie, Mrs. Johnsons quarrels with her husband and all this in no more than three initial chapters that open the novella.

When it comes to the violence of the children, Galdós' *La Desheredada* and Crane's *Maggie* share a surprising similar scene of a children's fight on the outskirts of the city. This kind of battle happens among small children whose violence surpasses the age of an innocent creature: "A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row, who were circling madly about the heap and pelting him" (*Maggie*: 1). This scene seems almost copied from the sixth chapter of *La Desheredada* called "¡Hombres!":

El *Majito*, cansado de parlamentar sin fruto ni resultado alguno, lanzó una piedra en medio de la turba de comerciantes. Al voltear, haciendo honda de su elástico brazo, parecía un gallito de veleta, obedeciendo más al viento que al coraje [...] Bajarse, elegir el guijarro, cogerlo, hacer el molinete con el brazo y lanzarlo, eran movimientos que se hacían con una celeridad inconcebible (*Desheredada*: 156-157).

The brutality of both scenes is emphasised by the contrast of infantile countenance with the fury of the battle. The social class which the boys belong to is made evident by the argotic language they employ "swearing in barbaric trebles" (*Maggie*:

1) and in the case of the Spanish author, the cries of the boys are accompanied by interferences of corrupted pronouns such as “vus” that reaffirm their belonging to a low socio-cultural stratum, where the children’s language already fully reveals its vulgar level. In their faces, there is no reflection of innocence but rage and brutality which makes them like human beasts: “On their small convulsed faces shone the grins of true assassins” (*Maggie*: 1). In Galdós, the initially innocent battle ends up with a boy stabbing a penknife into the stomach of his opponent. In this scene, Galdós combines in a realistic balance the mixture of brutality and innocence with which children act: it does not hide the horrible savagery of children, comparable to the most vesicular behavior we could find in an adult (stabbing is an extremely unusual act for children). However, he describes with sad sweetness their puerile naivety, because at the end of the day, even though it is their environment which has corrupted them, they still remain 10-year-old children who, facing the seriousness of the scene, burst into tears. With this scene, Galdós points at the government’s failure in children’s education, making them say the following: “Somos granujas; no somos aún la humanidad, pero sí un croquis de ella. España, somos tus polluelos, y cansados de jugar a los toros, jugamos a la guerra civil” (*Desheredada*: 151). Indeed, for Galdós, the future lies in the children, as the future generation of Spanish citizens.

Both Mariano and Jimmy are the result of this failing educational system as well as the evidence of the influence of the environment in which they were brought up. Both young men are known to the police for their previous arrests which began when still in childhood. When Maggie escapes from home, Jimmy tries to take revenge on the man who kidnapped her. In the bar where he meets Pete, together with a friend of his, he initiates a fight where “[h]e snarled like a wild animal (*Maggie*: 33). The tuggish behavior of Pete triggers a fight where “[t]hey bristled like three roosters. They moved their heads pugnaciously and kept their shoulders braced. The nervous muscles about each mouth twitched with a forced smile of mockery” (*ibid.*). In the summit of the fight, Crane describes them as “the three frothing creatures on the floor [who] buried themselves in a frenzy for blood” (*Maggie*: 34–35).

Even though Mariano’s violence is not as brutal as Jimmie’s, he ends up the same way due to the bad company he takes up with. Galdós does not entirely assign the fault of Mariano’s criminal career to hereditary issues as was common among criminologists of the time. It seems that the Spanish author is inclined to believe in the social reform of the Krausists, who argue that social conditions, such as poverty and lack of education, are the main causes of personal degradation. “Mariano is clearly not a born criminal, Galdós belongs firmly in the reformist camp, far from confident of its chances of success” (Ribbans, 2010:781).

## Conclusion

In the present study we could see how the literary technique of animalization, although almost universally covering the entire anonymous mass of the proletariat, plays a special role when it comes to the characterization of the brutality of certain characters, whose behavior is set in the laws of heredity and social determinism. In a greater or lesser degree, it corresponds to all of the elements that contribute to



dehumanizing them. In their singular way, the authors carry out an implicit expression of criticism of the social institutions, plausibly responsible for characters' dehumanization. There is no explicit and well-reasoned criticism, although there is a frank tone of lamentation of the growing capitalism which emphasizes the utility of human beings. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, the working class is being squeezed to the last drop of its productive energies, just like exploited domestic animals. The analyzed *oeuvres* portray in detail a progressive breaking of the physical and moral health of their protagonists, unable to escape these monstrous conditions of servitude. If the aim of naturalist writers was just to x-ray all the interstices of that misery and subjection to the environment, or if it was to make visible the traditionally hidden face of the poor, renouncing the bucolic portraits which were artistically embellished, it inevitably replaced poetic language with another full of jargon and vulgarisms, and beauty with exaggerated ugliness. This was partially done by the characters' animal behavior, uttering animal noises, belching or spitting. Although the purpose itself seems to contradict all artistic conventions and threatens to implant the aesthetics of rudeness as the various supporters of art for art's sake feared, the result is a literary pattern of a highly aesthetic content, as it greatly increases the delight of the corporeal, of the sensitive.

It is not, then, an objective and true reality, as Zola protested in his programmatic texts, but a more or less rationally motivated selection—by virtue of both ideological and artistic criteria—a densified sample of those aspects of reality usually ignored, and traditionally considered unworthy of becoming an artistic subject. This bold choice, as can be seen, imperatively requires a more intensive and extensive use of new aesthetics, like impressionist paintings, where the typically human ceases to be a protagonist, to be supplanted by the inhuman, the infra-human or, as Ortega y Gasset would say, the dehumanized: in this case, all these images acquire a degree of significance that is spared from words to be shown through the corporal expressiveness.

A human being in a naturalist text has not been completely condemned for its evil nature, but its humanity has been reduced to little more than a pious suspicion: the characters appear from beginning to end stigmatized by the environment in which they live and interact, a medium whose pernicious influence on them is fatal and irreversible, as dictated by Zola's semi-rational deterministic conviction. Their condition and destiny are hopelessly condemned by heredity and social misery, which is artistically conveyed right through the animalization of the individual. In the same way Crane reproduces a very similar idea, with the accent put on moral premises. On the contrary, Galdós revises this exaggerated deterministic and poisonous bias of Zola: even though the Spanish author departs from the fatalism of the French Naturalism, he insists on social improvement as a way to universal education. Less sensitive is the distance that barely separates the three novelists in their respective treatments of the characters, tending to caricaturize when their behaviors are described, presented as beasts produced by dehumanizing forces of their respective environments. In all of the cases the aesthetics of human beast is equally exaggerated and even grotesque, but it has its relative efficacy for the purpose of describing the true living conditions of the working class, as well as the most typical behaviors of its members, primary and degrading.

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